

# Unemployment Crisis

Throughout the English speaking Caribbean, governments are being forced to find solutions to the high level of unemployment. As it stands there are no easy solutions in the making. There is an acceptance that government remains the largest single employer, and therefore the expectation is that it will absorb many jobseekers within the public service. This is virtually impossible. It is to be expected that government will play a facilitating role in driving business development in the private sector. It has long been established that the private sector is the engine of growth in the economy, and hence the impetus given to the private sector by government through its policy initiatives, will have the net effect of helping to generate new job opportunities.

It is to be expected that politicians and trade unions have a vested interest in the issue of job creation. They would share the view that this makes for the healthy development of the economy, since it stands to reason that where there are high levels of employment, this could impact positively on the gross domestic product. Hopefully, this will in turn reduce the level of dependency on state social welfare institutions. In the current climate, where governments are seeking to reduce the cost of doing business by reducing employment numbers in the public service, the problem of growing unemployment is unlikely to go away anytime soon.

In attempting to find a solution to this problem, the call has been to support entrepreneurship and innovation. This is a lofty idea which will only bear fruit if those who venture down this path have access to funding support and technical assistance. With governments being cashed strapped, it would seem that grant funding is a fast diminishing option. The chances are that with the bulging unemployment numbers, many will resort to creating self employment. The reality however is that employment created may not be meaningful, productive or sustainable. As a matter of fact some of the areas of employment created in the informal sector may give cause for concern. There is the possibility that the prevailing economic climate provides the right environment for many illegal forms of business to develop and thrive.

The loss of confidence in governments may be eroded by their failure to facilitate job creation. They may be heavily criticized for policy measures instituted which contribute to contraction of employment in both the public and private sectors.

This is an issue which the society and politicians directly have to address. It may be that as far as governments and politicians are concerned, the immediate answer to the unemployment problem is to offer hope by promoting the notions of entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity. While this is good, the ideal falls short where the support systems to aid these new initiatives are non-existent. In addition, it is said that there are limited available financial resources, and in some instances the expertise to drive the efforts.

It is lofty to think that by providing training, this will be the immediate answer to the problem. There is still however an absence of direction regarding how the provision of training will in the short term address the unemployment issue. Basically the starting point should be the development of a road map that concentrates on the creation of new avenues of employment, which will lead to the absorption of the highly trained workforce.

Where there is a highly trained workforce in which many, for the most part, are unable to utilize their skills, talents and competencies, the long and short of it is that the country is the poorer for it. The hard fact is that those who gain employment in low paying jobs are virtually underemployed. The country is likely to face a brain drain as some go in search of job opportunities on the global market.

The summary is that small developing countries can ill afford illegal forms of employment, underemployment and unsustainable employment. It therefore stands to reason that if these remain features of the economy and society, recovery from economic decline may not be as quick as anticipated or projected.